



**Ashtavakra Institute of Rehabilitation Sciences & Research**  
Formerly Special Art School

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**ASHTAVAKRA JOURNAL CLUB**

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**Topic-** SELF-ADVOCACY FOR ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

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**ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** To equip people with knowledge to make informed, authentic decisions, and to empower them to make those decisions. It focuses on their political power and right to self-determination. Further, people who self-advocate ultimately enjoy a higher quality of life, as they have confidence in themselves, know how to properly express their feelings, and are empowered to make their own decisions. And helped many people with disabilities to speak up and gain confidence.

**Methods:** In this qualitative study the authors used a constructivist grounded theory methodology . We wanted to focus on the significance of self-advocates' experiences and the possible impact of being a self-advocate on their social participation. We used emancipatory principles as well, "where the views of people with disabilities are central to the research process and the value of the research undertaken is gauged by how far the process of participation makes a contribution to the individual or collective empowerment of disabled people.

The method used for data collection was focus group interviews. They were relaxed and informal, took place in the offices of self-advocates' groups. The questions concerned topics such as roles and tasks in adult life, meaning given to self-advocacy, personal experiences connected with self-advocacy movement, social participation.

The three focus groups, which were from the same organization in northern Poland, consisted of five to seven participants. All the participants are adults with disabilities who are active members of self-advocates groups. Potential participants were identified on the basis of interest in being interviewed. The aims of the study were outlined during the introductory meeting. A total of eighteen participants, seven women and eleven men, ranging in age from 22 to 58 years decided to take part in focus



groups. Participants were divided into three mixed groups. Every focus group interview lasted approximately one hour. Two major theme areas emerged from the data: meaning of self-advocacy and experiences of adults as far as social contacts and social participation are concerned. Names of participants and the service they are involved in have been changed due to confidentiality and anonymity.

**Results:** Social participation (e.g. living on their own, having a job, taking part in leisure activities) is connected with cultural and economic capital and depends on the support and services received by individuals with disabilities. Some show that disabled adults' social participation is often connected with restrictive environment and segregated activities specially organized for people with disabilities. On the other hand, appropriate support can increase these people opportunity to participation in society.

The key elements emphasized by self-advocates argue this image of people with disabilities. However, the narratives also suggest that self-advocates still do not feel real independence and self-determination and although emphasize their rights and inclusion in the society, they cannot imagine a group of self-advocates without a leader without disabilities. Besides, self-advocates groups are not independent but run under the supervision of Polish Association for Persons with Disabilities which was originally the organization formed by parents of children with this type of disability.

**Conclusion:** Identity development, self-advocacy, and community connection are fundamental to the experience of having a disability. The process of disability identity development is strengthened and enriched through connection with others who have shared experiences and goals. This sense of disability as a political community can provide an important way to navigate ableism, stigma, and discrimination that youth with disabilities face daily. Understanding ourselves as connected to one another in this way strengthens the broader disability community and its goals as a whole.

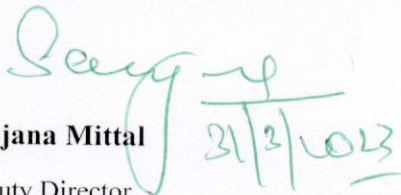
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